

# The American Civil War

by Herbert Aptheker



NEW YORK  
INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

## CONTENTS

The Origins	6
The Socio-Economic Transformation in the South	7
The Growth of Abolitionism	10
Intensification of Conflict within the South	11
Contradictions within Plantation-Slavery System	13
Was Secession Popular in the South?	15
The Conduct of the War	17
The Negro People in the War	19
The Results of the War	21

Library of Congress Catalog Number 16-17400

COPYRIGHT, 1961 by

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS CO., INC.

Printed in the United States

## THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

FROM 1861 to 1865 civil war ravaged the United States. This War has been a favorite pre-occupation with American historians—and novelists—ever since it occurred; literally thousands of volumes have been devoted to one or another aspect of the conflict. Now, with the centennial, the United States is being deluged with additional books and articles and plays dealing with the War. The general purpose of the literature—new and old—is to treat the War as either a senseless and needless tragedy resulting from human failure, or a mechanically determined conflict deriving from immutable and inflexible tendencies, in which human interest, desires, plans and activities were irrelevant. The body of the literature as a whole manages to be more or less ardently pro-Confederate; almost all of it suffers from a virulent chauvinism reflected either in the omission of the Negro people from any serious consideration, or in picturing the Negro masses as indifferent to the War or, if anything, "loyal" to the master class and its Confederate States.

Since the Civil War revolves around basic issues—many of them still burning questions, in somewhat altered form, in the present United States—the literature about it is not only large but very tendentious and emotional. Involved is the whole question of counter-revolution and the nature of revolution, the status and rights of the Negro people and of the masses of poorer Southern white people, the "patriotism" of the rich—North and South—the active role of the masses in the making of history and their decisive role in saving the Republic, the reality of international solidarity, etc. All these matters are not questions simply of antiquarian interest; on the contrary, they possess the most direct relevance to present-day American life and politics. With current American reality being the domination of the Government by monopolists, and therefore a sharply reactionary orientation internally and externally, the ruling tendency in historical writing is pro-Confederate, just as for World War II it is anti-Soviet.

## THE ORIGINS

IN origin, the Civil War in the United States was an attempted counter-revolution carried out by a desperate slaveholding class. The aggressors were the dominant elements among the slaveowners, and the resort to violence was long planned, carefully prepared and ruthlessly launched. There was not unanimity among the slaveowners; some feared that the resort to violence would fail and that its result would be the destruction of the slave system. But those who so argued were over-ruled and the richest and most powerful among the planter-slaveholders carried the day for secession and war.

Why did the slaveholding class violently attack the Government of the United States in 1861? It did so because it had become convinced that it had everything to gain and nothing to lose by a resort to violence; and, in the past, whenever an exploitative ruling class has reached this decision—and had the power to do so—it turned to violence. Here, specifically, the decisive elements in the slaveholding oligarchy came to the conclusion that if they acquiesced in the developments culminating in Lincoln's election in 1860, they would, in fact, acquiesce in their own demise; that if, on the contrary, they did not passively yield, but refused to accept this culmination, they had, at any rate, a fighting chance to reverse the course of those developments. In other words, they decided: if we yield now we shall be buried; if we do not, we may win and so bury another. But if we lose we shall be no worse off than if we did not fight—*i.e.*, if we lose we shall then be buried. Given belief in such an alternative—and given the capacity to undertake it and carry it out—all exploitative ruling classes have chosen the path of counter-revolutionary violence. Such classes are devoid of humanistic feelings; suffering means nothing to them, since their rule is posited on human travail and their wealth and power derive from its infliction; such considerations were especially marked among the American slaveowners—arrogant, ruthless and racist to the core.

Affirming that a sense of desperation drove the slaveholding class

onto the path of counter-revolutionary violence, leads at once to the question: what made this class desperate? What convinced its leaders that they had everything to gain and nothing to lose if they chose the path of civil war?

There were four great forces producing this result, interpenetrating and influencing each other.

First: the momentous socio-economic transformation of the United States north of the Mason-Dixon line and extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River; second: the quantitative and qualitative growth of the Abolitionist movement; third: the intensification of mass unrest and class conflict within the South; fourth: the accumulating impact of certain organic contradictions within the plantation-slavery system.

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE NORTH

THE basic nature of the shift in socio-economic foundations in the North appearing with the Revolutionary War, accelerating with the War of 1812 and its aftermath and accumulating speed after 1840—was the growing weight of industrialization and urbanization. It is in the decade of 1850-1860 that the value of the product of the factories approaches the value of the product of the soil for the first time in American history; that is the great water-shed mark. Before that, agriculture had significantly outweighed industry in the total economy; after that the reverse was to be increasingly true. The turning point comes in the decade preceding secession and marking the appearance and growth of the new Republican Party. In 1790 about 5% of the total population was urban (living in places of 2,500 inhabitants or more); in 1830 about 8% was urban; in 1860 about 20% was urban—and while this urbanization did not completely skip the South, it was overwhelmingly concentrated in the North.

The population leap in the United States is remarkable in the pre-Civil War generation, rising from 12.8 millions in 1830 to 31.4 millions in 1860, but while half the population of the country lived in the South in 1830, about one-third the population of the country lived there in 1860. In the 1830's immigration to the United States averaged about 50,000 per year; in the 1850's immigration averaged about 250,000 each

year—and the vast majority of these newly-arrived working people settled outside the slave-ridden areas.

A rising industrial bourgeoisie was one of the results of these developments; but the predominant class in the government of the United States in the 1830's and 1840's was the slaveholding class. Its predominance was not without challenge, and increasing challenges, as the years passed and the changes accumulated, but that class did rule. It dominated Congress and its committees; it dominated the Presidency; it had a majority in the Supreme Court; apologia for slavery characterized the prevailing and respectable institutions—the press, the churches, the schools, the texts. A domestic and foreign policy to the liking of the slaveholding class characterized U.S. history during these decades. This politico-ideological superstructure became increasingly anachronistic and inhibiting as the socio-economic base was transformed in the manner indicated. Hence, political and ideological battles and recurring crises marked the period from the late 1840's and especially the 1850's; the culmination, politically, was the smashing of the two-party system, the emergence of a new, broad, coalition-type party, under the hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie, and the ultimate victory of that Party in the 1860 elections.

Additional decisive changes were occurring in the socio-economic structure of the North. With the rise of industry and with urbanization, appeared a more and more numerous working class, and both its organization and its consciousness intensified as the Civil War approached. They found the institution of slavery more and more reprehensible—here the influx of thousands of revolutionary exiles from the Europe of 1830 and 1848 played a significant role—and found their own interests less and less considered insofar as the federal government and its policies were concerned, dominated as that government was by the slaveowners. Fundamental ideological conflict appeared, especially as the challenged and distraught slavocracy began to develop a full-blown theory of the propriety and necessity—if “civilization” were to survive—of the enslavement of the laboring portion of any country's population, whether its complexion be light or dark.

Significant distinctions began to appear among the commercial bourgeoisie of the North. With the growth of factories in the North and the development of agricultural production there, slave-grown produce played a smaller and smaller part in the businesses of Northern merchants. In-

creasingly, these merchants were engaged in hauling and selling corn, wheat, cattle-products, machinery, shoes, clothing, furniture, rather than sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton. The merchant bourgeoisie had been the fundamental political allies of the slaveholding planters and the bulwark of the northern wing of the Democratic Party, generally the preferred party of those planters. Now, this Northern economic and political bulwark was split; this is of basic importance in comprehending the actual division that occurred in the Democratic Party with the election of 1860, so that two Democratic Party candidates ran for the Presidency (Douglas of Illinois on the Northern ticket and Breckinridge of Kentucky on the Southern)—without which split, Lincoln would not have been successful.

Meanwhile what was then the West—from the Ohio to the Mississippi to the Great Lakes—was being swiftly populated. Pressure mounted for a rapid and democratic land-settlement policy on the part of the Federal government, only to meet the rigid resistance of the planters; at the same time, the movement was made possible because of the tying together of the East and the West with thousands of miles of newly-laid railroads. This in turn fed the growth of industry in the northeast; it served, also, to unite the farm west and the factory east, and to defeat Calhoun's grand plan of an agricultural united front of western farmers and southern planters and farmers which would outweigh the urbanizing east.

This socio-economic transformation showed itself, among other aspects, in the smashing of the traditional political apparatus, and in the coming to the fore, through the new Party, of new demands appropriate to the interests of the developing classes: a protective tariff, internal improvements at federal expense, national currency and banking legislation, a homestead law, the exclusion of slavery from the federal lands, a reversal of domestic and foreign policies favoring the slaveholders, including the rejection of the vitiating of the Bill of Rights which had been so prominent a part of the cost of maintaining slavery.

## THE GROWTH OF ABOLITIONISM

UNLESS one sees the revolutionary nature of the Abolitionist movement, he cannot understand it. This movement hitherto has been presented as either the unfortunate fruit of the labors of mischievous fanatics or as some kind of liberalistic, reformistic, benevolent enterprise. These views agree in ignoring the fundamental character of the movement: a Negro-white, radical effort to revolutionize America, by overthrowing its dominant class. That is, Abolitionism sought the elimination of that form of property ownership which was basic to the power of the slaveholding class, and it was that class which effectively dominated the government of the United States during the pre-Civil War generation.

The movement, being revolutionary, suffered persecution and fierce denunciation; but its members—Negro and white, men and women, Northerners and Southerners, with a large percentage of youth, and almost all of them not of the rich—persevered, as true revolutionaries, and finally led the nation to victory. Its great curse, early in its life, was sectarianism; it advocated courses which persistently narrowed its appeal—for instance, an extreme pacifism and anarchism. But as the classes objectively opposed to the continued domination of slavery grew, as the existence of slavery in the United States became a more and more intolerable stench in the nostrils of civilized peoples in the world, as the struggles of the slaves themselves mounted, and as the reactionary offensive of the slave-owners impinged on the rights and beliefs of ever wider elements in the population, the movement itself grew. As it grew, it found the sectarianism more and more contradictory and absurd and so developed a much more rounded, flexible and politically astute outlook; this in turn stimulated further growth. This growth was qualitative as well as quantitative; the movement turned more and more to effective political efforts and to the renunciation of a crippling kind of pacifism, especially in the face of the institutionalized violence of the slaveowners.

Increasingly, as the 1840's gave way to the 1850's, the Abolitionists became admired and respected leaders of groups decisive in both an ideological and a political sense; by the 1850's the *N. Y. Tribune*—the newspaper with the largest circulation in the nation, whose European correspondent was Karl Marx—was decidedly anti-slavery, though not actually Abolitionist.

It is not without interest that some of this sectarianism infected working-class oriented and even Marxist-inspired groups. Some tended to view the conflict between a slave-based agrarianism and a wage-labor based industrialism as merely a contest between two sets of "bosses" concerning which "real" Marxists could have no choice. Fortunately, Marx was then very much alive and when he was appealed to for his opinion as to whether or not Marxian socialists should take a "plague-on-both-your-houses" position in this conflict, he replied that he was appalled that anyone alleging adherence to his views could possibly raise such a question. Of course, Marx insisted, Socialists were the strongest foes of chattel slavery because, in the first place, they desired the liberation of four million slaves and because, in the second place, as between industrial capitalism and agrarian slaveholding, the former was the more progressive force and the latter was completely backward and regressive.

The quantitative and qualitative growth of the Abolitionist movement was seen by the slave-owning class. Its culmination in the sensational success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* early in the 1850's, the extraordinary sale and influence of the economic analysis of the backwardness of slavery produced by Hinton Rowan Helper, a non-slaveholder from North Carolina, under the title *The Impending Crisis* (1857), and then the noble martyrdom of immortal John Brown and his Negro and white comrades, and the intense sympathy they aroused throughout the North and the world, helped create a sense of panic and desperation in the minds of the dominant slaveowners.

## INTENSIFICATION OF CONFLICT WITHIN THE SOUTH

THE rulers of the South always have sought to propagate the idea that their region is "solid," is united in support of the "way of life" characterizing the area. This effort is made today, and the picture it seeks to spread is quite false; the effort was made in the days of slavery, and the picture conventionally presented of that epoch—of a monolithic South with the Negro slaves cherishing their chains and with all the whites, regardless of class position, firmly committed to slaveholding dominance in the name of white supremacy—also was thoroughly false.

The fact is that the slave South was an area torn by antagonism and basic contradictions: slaves versus slaveowners, large slaveowners versus

the smaller slaveowners, the non-slaveholding whites versus the slaveholding whites, and especially opposed to the richest among them. Far from the Negro people being docile and "ideal" slaves, they created a heritage of militant and ingenious struggle during their crucifixion that has no superior among any people on earth. They resisted their oppressors in every possible way: they "slowed up" in their work; they fled by the thousands; they rose individually in rebellion; they plotted and rebelled collectively scores of times; they infused their stories and songs and music and religion—every aspect of their lives—with this central theme: resist slavery; struggle for freedom. In this sense the magnificent liberation struggles of the American Negro people today are in direct line with and represent a splendid continuation of the profoundest traditions of their entire history.

This militancy reached its highest point, in the history of American slavery, during the decade from 1850 through 1860. In that period more slaves fled—singly and in groups—than ever before; more individual assaults against slaveowners occurred than ever before; more slave conspiracies and uprisings occurred than before, and many of them had a deeper political content—including the demands for the distribution of the land—than before, and characteristically in this decade, unlike the previous period, whites were involved in such plots and uprisings. The master class was keenly aware of this intensified unrest of the slaves; their private letters, diaries and newspapers are filled with concern about it.

Class struggle between slaveowners and non-slaveowners characterizes all Southern politics from about 1790 on; but this reached its most intense and most widespread form in the years from 1850 to 1860. The struggle appeared in the growing cities and especially in the predominant agrarian areas. It took the form of the creation of new anti-slaveowners political parties, and of significant organized efforts by the non-slaveowners to overthrow the political domination of the plantation lords. The aim was the remaking of the political structure, of the taxation system, of the educational system; the aim was the achievement of something approximating an advanced bourgeois-democratic society. Its greatest weakness was that while it opposed the slaveowning class, it did not oppose slavery as such; while it hated the planters, it lost no love for the slaves. The whole system of chattel slavery made extremely difficult the

forging of unity among the Negro and white victims of the plantation oligarchy, and while some advances towards such unity were made—and terrified the Bourbons—the fact is that these advances fell far short of the achievement of any *real* solidarity.

But, while the effort to overthrow the dominance of the slaveholding oligarchy within the South was not successful, it was serious and it worried that oligarchy very much. Many of its leaders actually feared civil war at home before they could launch their counter-revolutionary effort against Washington. This internal challenge to the continued domination of the South by the Bourbon has been relatively neglected in the literature; it is, nevertheless, one of the fundamental forces driving the slaveholding class to the desperate strategy of creating the Confederacy and attacking the United States government.

#### CONTRADICTIONS WITHIN PLANTATION-SLAVERY SYSTEM

**I**N addition to the forces already described, certain contradictions organic to the nature of the plantation system, as a socio-economic system, were plaguing it and driving its masters distraught. First, the system was one that required steady and swift expansion in order to live. The system existed for the purpose of realizing a profit from the sale of commodities in a world market. The rate of profit rose in direct correlation with the increase in the number of slaves employed and in the acreage tilled, especially the tilling of virgin lands, where the crops per acre rose. The system of slavery, where mechanization was minimized and scientific farming was almost unknown, required constant expansion. Here fertilization, dry-farming, varying the crops planted, etc., either was not comprehended or was not practical, or the necessary fluid capital was not at hand—especially in view of the fact that about one thousand dollars of capital was tied up in the ownership of each slave.

The system of American slavery was intensely oligarchic; it moved rather quickly towards the declassing of the smaller slaveowners and the concentration of the ownership of slaves and more and more land—and the best land—in the hands of fewer and fewer great planters. While 35% of the white population in the South had some interest—direct or indirect, through family—in slaveholding in 1850, this figure had dropped

to 25% by 1860. It is this sharp oligarchic tendency in the slave system which accounts for the intensity of the class struggle characterizing it; and it is the especially swift rate of such concentration during the pre-Civil War decade that explains the particularly sharp nature of the class struggle marking that period.

The natural tendency towards expansionism of the slave system had two other significant stimulators. One was the fact that the piling up of a slave population within a restricted area intensifies police problems. Such problems were considerable in any case; they might reach Santo-Domingo proportions, with equally disastrous results for the slave holders, if they did not manage to acquire new land regularly into which the slave population could be sent and thus that "dangerous" component in the population diffused.

In addition, plantation expansionism had a clear political motive. Slavery in the United States—localized in the South—faced the development of the free-labor system outside of the South. One of the meeting places of this developing conflict was the federal public lands; if these were to be settled by free farmers and workers and by a wage-based bourgeoisie then the political weight of the West would fall on the anti-slavery side and the planters' domination of the federal government would end.

For all these reasons, the expansionism of the slave-South was intense and notorious. It helped precipitate war with Mexico in the 1840's—a rather unpopular war outside the South; it helped account for filibustering assaults against Nicaragua a little later; for the diplomatic pronouncement by three U.S. Ministers in Europe that Cuba should belong to the United States and not to Spain; and for the naval expedition financed by the U.S. government through the Amazon Valley region of Brazil, with an eye to weighing its possibilities as a base for an extended slave empire.

At the same time, this expansionism precipitated the sharpest kinds of political struggles on the national election scene; it was the Republican Party's promise that "not a foot" of federal soil would be given over to slavery—and Lincoln's insistence, after his election, on keeping that promise—that finally decided the slaveowners that whatever the Republican Party might promise as to the sanctity of slavery "where it was," the promise was useless in fact since if slavery could not expand into where it was not, it could not last long where it was.

## WAS SECESSION POPULAR IN THE SOUTH?

THE Confederate assault upon Washington and the secession from the United States was a counter-revolutionary development. It was counter-revolutionary not only in its regressive motivations and its profoundly anti-democratic essence—challenging as it did the integrity of the bourgeois-democratic republic and the ideology of the Declaration of Independence; it was counter-revolutionary, too, in that it was done secretly, with malice aforethought, and *against the will of the vast majority of the Southern people*. One-third of those people—the Negro masses—abhorred the Confederacy, of course, and desired nothing so much as its destruction which, they knew, would mean their own emancipation. But, in addition, the majority of the eight million Southern white people—there were in 1860 only about 300,000 actual slaveowners—also detested the planting oligarchy and also were opposed to secession and to the whole Confederate conspiracy.

The bulk of the literature on the Civil War assumes or asserts the contrary, and insists that the Confederate movement had the overwhelming support of the masses of Southern whites, at least. But the truth is the opposite. This is why the leaders of secession made no effort to submit the question of secession to a vote of the restricted electorate in the southern states—prior to secession—and why, in fact, they resisted all proposals for such a vote. It is for this reason, too, that this so-called popular uprising disintegrated when put to the test of a war carried to the South by the invading and—allegedly—bitterly despised foe.

In eight States of the Confederacy the question of secession was never submitted to a vote of the electorate. In the three States where the question of secession was voted upon—Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas—this was not done until after each of them had already been committed to the Confederacy, and hostilities had actually begun (except for Texas, where the voting occurred on Feb. 25, 1861). Furthermore, even the voting—held under war-time conditions, with secession an accomplished fact, and with secessionists counting the votes—showed these results: Texas, for secession, 34,794; against, 11,235; Virginia, for secession, 128,884; against, 32,134; Tennessee, for secession, 104,019; against, 47,238. Moreover, even in these three, Tennessee split in half, Virginia split in half, and the

Governor of Texas (the anti-secessionist, Sam Houston) was illegally superseded.

The Southern counter-revolutionists knew their cause was not popular and said so. It was, for example, ex-Congressman Aldrich of South Carolina who said of secession, late in 1860: "I do not believe the common people understand it but whoever waited for the common people when a great movement was to be made? We must make the move and force them to follow." It was ex-Governor Richardson of South Carolina who declared during the same period that the white people of no State in the south was for secession with the possible exception of his own. It was Edmund Ruffin, one of the richest slaveowners and a leading ideologist of secession—he was given the "honor" of firing the first round against Fort Sumter—who confided to his diary on April 2, 1861, that it was "communicated privately by members of each delegation [to the Confederate Constitutional Convention] that it was supposed people of every State, except South Carolina, was indisposed to the disruption of the Union—and that if the question of reconstruction of the former Union was referred to the popular vote, that there was probability of its being approved."

Only this background makes understandable the complete disintegration of the Confederacy when put to the test of battle. Pro-Bourbon historians, faced with this utter collapse, have no real explanations. Thus, for example, Professor E. Merton Coulter, co-editor of the multi-volumed and "definitive" *History of the South*, in the volume which he himself wrote in that series, *The Confederate States of America* (1950), "explains" the collapse by saying it resulted from a "loss of morale," that "the spirit of the people gave way" (p. 70); or, "why did the Confederacy fail? . . . The people did not will hard enough and long enough to win" (p. 566).

But Coulter's explanation explains nothing; it rather poses the question in different words. Why was there a "loss of morale"; why did "the spirit of the people give way"? Because it was not a popular war; because Congressman Aldrich and Governor Richardson and Edmund Ruffin, and the members of the Confederate Constitutional Convention were correct when they feared that the Southern white people—let alone the Negroes—did not favor secession.

## THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR

NOWHERE was Karl Marx' genius more dramatically demonstrated than in his grasp of the real nature of the Civil War and in his comprehension of the unpopular character of the Confederacy. The military experts of the world were agreed that the North would not be able to defeat the South; at best they saw a long and drawn-out war exhausting both sides with some kind of military draw resulting and a negotiated settlement concluding the conflict. Marx disagreed; he held that the North would defeat the South and do so rather quickly and accomplish it utterly. And Marx insisted on this exactly because he knew it was not the North versus the South, but rather the United States versus a slaveholding oligarchy. Marx, of course, paid careful attention to the class forces involved in the struggle; he followed with close attention the procedure of secession; he noted that no plebiscite on this was permitted. He insisted upon the oligarchic and non-popular character of the Confederacy.

The world's military profession agreed that the Confederacy, with its great population, its enormous area, its tremendous coastline, its numerous military cadre, would never be defeated by the North (this was another reason for the failure of France and England to intervene more actively than they did on the side of the Confederacy—why do so when she *could* not lose?) Indeed, even Frederick Engels seriously doubted the outcome of the war, and as late as September, 1862, asked Marx: "Do you still believe that the gentlemen in the North will crush the 'rebellion'?"

Marx replied that he "would wager his head" on that belief. It was based, he wrote, not only on Lincoln's supremacy in resources and men (for this alone need not be decisive—witness the American colonies versus Great Britain, Holland versus Spain, etc.), but also on the fact that the South was not in rebellion, but that rather an oligarchy of some 300,000 slaveholders had engineered a counter-revolutionary *coup d'état*.

Individual monographic studies by Laura White, Georgia L. Tatum, Olive Stone, Herbert Aptheker, Albert Moore, Charles Wesley, John K. Bettersworth, Harvey Wish, Roger W. Shugg, W. E. B. Du Bois, Bell Wiley, and others have demonstrated the enormous amount of popular disaffection—among Negro and white—which bedevilled the Con-

federacy, ranging from mass desertions, organized guerrilla warfare (of which, by the way, there was almost none inside the South *against the Union forces*), mass flights of slaves, strikes in factories, hunger demonstrations and riots, anti-conscription outbreaks, etc.

When one remembers the degree of treason among the officer caste in the United States Army—with almost none among the enlisted men—the pro-Confederate activities of Buchanan's Administration in the days before Lincoln took office, the Copperheadism in the North, the white chauvinism there, the graft and corruption with which the bourgeoisie always conducts government and especially government faced with war, the hostility of most western European governments to Abraham Lincoln's government and the assistance given the Confederacy, one must conclude that there were grounds, apparently, for the belief that the North would lose. In the face of all these sources of weakness, Lincoln's victory—and within four years, little enough time, as 19th century wars were conducted, especially in the vast distances of the United States—could not have transpired without the active opposition to the Confederacy by the overwhelming majority of Southern people.

In the result of the War, the sympathy for the cause of the Union felt by the common people of all Europe, of Canada and of Mexico was important. The role of the First International, under the personal leadership of Karl Marx, in helping to organize and focus this popular opposition, especially in Great Britain, is well-known. Less well known is the important contribution to the Union cause made by the Mexican revolutionary masses, led by the great Benito Juarez, in resisting the efforts of France to conquer Mexico. Had this conquest been complete and not seriously contested, the Confederacy would have had a long land border with a friendly French power, and this would have added difficulties to the imposition of an effective blockade of the Confederacy. It is somewhat ironic that the Mexican masses helped preserve the integrity of the United States, less than twenty years after the United States had stolen from Mexico, through war, one-third of its own territory.

In the actual fighting of the War, it was the common people—the working men and the farming masses—who bore the brunt of the battle, made the sacrifices in blood, crushed the Confederacy, and saved the American Republic. The basic patriotism of these masses—in the South and in the North—came to the fore and with it grew an understanding of the stakes of the conflict so far as the cause of democracy was concerned.

#### THE NEGRO PEOPLE IN THE WAR

BY now a considerable literature depicting in truthful and realistic terms the absolutely decisive role of the Negro people in the Civil War has made its appearance. It was to maintain and extend the system of their enslavement that the counter-revolution was launched; here one has a classical example of the profound involvement of the general fate of the United States, and especially of the democratic advancement of the United States, with the specific condition of the Negro people. Here one sees how the system of the Negro's special oppression almost caused the suicide of the entire American republic.

The Negro leadership was in the forefront of the effort to make clear the decisive nature of the slave system to the power of the Confederacy; it therefore led in advancing the necessity to revolutionize the conduct of the war. The war, if conducted passively, defensively, if conducted only to "defend the Union" with an insistence that the institution of slavery was irrelevant to the conflict, would not terminate happily for the Union. No, to defend the Union it was necessary to destroy the power base of those who attacked it; to defend the Union it was necessary to add to its resources the mighty power and passion of the Negro millions. To defend the Union it was necessary to destroy slavery. The salvation of the Union required the emancipation of the slaves; the emancipation of the slaves required the salvation of the Union. Thus did the dialectics of history manifest itself in specific form in the great Civil War.

The process of revolutionizing the conduct of the war was a relatively prolonged one; and it was one that required agitation, organization and struggle. In this, the Negro masses were in the front ranks. And when success was achieved in the basic change of strategy, to implement the change, the Negro fighter would have to step forward and show his mettle. The Negro people did so and did so with decisive results for the course of the War. About 220,000 Negro men fought as soldiers; about 25,000 battled as seamen. Another 250,000 Negro men and women served Lincoln's forces as teamsters, scouts, pioneers (what are now called engineer troops), cooks, nurses, fortification and railroad builders, etc. And, in the South, the Negro masses were the eyes and ears of the advancing Union forces; without effective military intelligence, battles and wars cannot be won. The best source of such intelligence for Lincoln's army

and navy came from the Negro masses who knew—and know—the South better than anyone else. Meanwhile, Negro slaves fled by the thousands—probably half a million succeeded in fleeing during the four years of War—and in doing this withdrew their labor power from the despised Confederacy and brought it to the side of the Union. Dr. Du Bois once characterized this phenomenon of mass flight as a kind of "mobile general strike" and the observation is highly illuminating.

Conventional American historiography—deeply chauvinist as it is—presents the Civil War as a white man's quarrel as a result of which rather absent-mindedly the Negro people were *given* their freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth; the basic connection between the institution of slavery and the source and nature of the Civil War is clear, and the active role of the Negro people in fighting for their own emancipation—and for the integrity of the Republic—is established by the evidence. Rather than declaring that the American Negro people were given their freedom as an incident of the War for the Union, it would be more accurate to say that the Negro people contributed decisively towards the salvation of the Union as part of their heroic battle to achieve emancipation.

This whole matter shows again the deep interpenetration of the history and struggles of the Negro people with the struggles of the mass of the American people altogether to advance the cause of progress and democracy; it shows, too, that in this organic connection no one is doing anyone else any favors. This matter of Negro-white unity is a question not of benevolence but of alliance.

Policies of compromise and gradualism—both of which were advocated and followed prior to, and even during the early phases of the War—are disastrous. Especially where the Negro question is concerned—this being a principled question—such policies reflect in fact acquiescence in Negro oppression; they are devices not for the elimination of such oppression, but for its continuation.

The Civil War demonstrates that decisive governmental acts are of the greatest importance where the fight for Negro liberation is concerned. Such acts possess tremendous practical and educational significance. Thus, it was widely held that it was "impossible" to make soldiers of Negro men, give them guns and put them in the field fighting with white men against other white men. But what was held to be

"impossible" was soon seen not only to be possible, but necessary. Since its necessity was comprehended by the Lincoln government—with that government being prodded by the Negro people and the Abolitionists in general—it did adopt the policy of arming Negro men and putting them into combat on land and in the sea. And there was nothing "impossible" about it; the dire prophecies as to what would happen and how whole regiments of white soldiers would desert at once, etc., did not come to pass.

They did not come to pass because the Lincoln government made it clear that it was serious about this policy and because that government said that its own existence depended upon the enforcement of that policy.

Similar results—after the expression of similar fears—followed other Executive acts, such as the recognition of the Negro Republic of Haiti, the equalization of pay between Negro and white soldiers, and—decisive act that it was—the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

## THE RESULTS OF THE WAR

THE basic structure of modern America is laid down with the Civil War and its outcome. The unity of the republic is confirmed; the preservation of the bourgeois-democratic form is achieved. Industrial capitalism emerges triumphant and dominant; it fastens its grip upon the State and it leaps forward mightily as an economic force. Organization of this bourgeoisie on a national scale is achieved and it moves swiftly ahead toward achieving complete hegemony over the national market. At the same time, with the leap ahead of industrial capitalism, its necessary antagonist leaps forward too; the working class multiplies in a short period and becomes very much more highly organized—also upon a national scale—by 1866 than it had been in 1860.

By constitutional amendments—the 13th and 14th—the institution of chattel slavery is prohibited and efforts at compensation by some of the former slaveowners thwarted. Here appeared an extremely significant precedent; these Amendments consummated a revolutionary transformation. With the 13th amendment, several billion dollars worth of private property—hitherto perfectly legal—were confiscated and by this blow a basic element in an entire social fabric was eliminated. This was done

on the basis of the reactionary and truly subversive character of such property ownership; it is a revolutionary precedent that the present ruling class prefers should be forgotten.

In preserving the bourgeois democratic form, in the leap forward of industrial capitalism, in its achieving governmental domination, in the destruction of the system of chattel slavery, in the emancipation of four million Negro men and women, in the advance of the labor movement, the American Civil War, which begins as a counter-revolutionary effort, terminates as the Second American Revolution.

That the industrial bourgeoisie, swiftly moving towards monopoly status, coveting the enormous resources of the South, desiring the retention in the country of a large mass of especially exploited working people, and wanting the political support of the former slaveowners, fail to complete this Revolution is another question. They are a leading element in the coalition of forces which hurls back the threat of the slaveowners, but when that common foe is defeated, the bourgeoisie betrays the coalition—and especially the Negro people. It allows the former slaveowners to remain the dominant plantation owners; it makes of them satraps—"little foxes," in the words of Lillian Hellman's incisive drama—and the basis of the Republican-Dixiecrat reactionary alliance is laid back in the 1870's betrayal of the hopes of the masses.

Much unfinished business remains from the Civil War, and much more unfinished business has accumulated for the forces of democracy and peace in the century since that war was fought. The "handling" of these questions creates every day's headlines in the American press; they remain fundamental social questions, on a new level, for the United States of the 1960's.

Their nature cannot be understood, however, without a comprehension of the great struggle waged in the United States from 1861 to 1865. That struggle was a momentous landmark in the effort to secure a "government of the people, by the people, for the people." The struggle continues, on new and higher levels, in our time. The American people have not been found wanting in the decisive struggles of the past, and they will not be found wanting in our own new and challenging epoch.

*A Centennial Edition \$4.00*

## THE CIVIL WAR IN THE UNITED STATES

KARL MARK and FREDERICK ENGELS

All of Marx's and Engels' writings, including newly discovered essays, on the American Civil War — which they termed "the first grand war of contemporaneous history" — are gathered in this volume. Their contributions to the *New York Tribune* and to the *Vienna Presse*, as well as a voluminous correspondence, present a panoramic picture of the conflict. As the European correspondent for the *Tribune*, Marx explained the attitude of the European powers and the English workers toward the Union cause and discussed the international implications of the war. In the letters and in the numerous *Presse* articles Marx and Engels showed the Civil War as a clash of two social systems, analyzed the forces arrayed against each other, discussed Lincoln's policies and explained each turn in events.

From their analysis of the military phases of the struggle and of the class forces at work they were able to predict the military strategy which led to victory and to foresee significant revolutionary developments, such as the emancipation and the arming of the freedmen.